
Conditions For Building A Framework Of Sustainability Indicators In Tourism (Case: Suchitoto).

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Abstract

It is unavoidable to mention that the tourism sector is becoming increasingly important on the international agenda due to the economic benefits it brings with it and that in a very concrete way it is summarized in the contribution it generates in the formation of the gross domestic product of several economies worldwide, but also because of the concern of climate change itself, and of course El Salvador, As part of the Central American region, it is also heading in the same direction. However, it is important to delve into whether the economic benefits generated at the country level through the attraction of tourists are developed under the paradigm of sustainable tourism, that is, aligned with its socio-cultural, economic and environmental benefits, but in each of the territories in which there is a tourist destination.

Precisely, the objective of the project is to identify the conditions that exist to adopt a sustainable tourism strategy in the municipality of Suchitoto, using a qualitative research approach through a case study and supported by participant and non-participant observation complemented with interviews with the different key actors linked to the activity of the destination under study.

The tourist destination as such has several attractions for which it is already part of the guided tours carried out by mostly foreign tourists who like experiences ranging from hiking, contact with nature, landscaping, and coexistence with local people; However, the path to adequately enhance the sustainability of the destination and each of its actors begins precisely with the proposal of a

Sustainability Observatory that manages different indicators that help preserve socio-cultural and environmental conditions and contribute to the social, educational, economic and technological development of their communities.

KEYWORDS: Tourist destination, local actors, social dimension, economic dimension, environmental dimension, sustainability indicators. Pursuit of happiness, harsh realities of life, character portrayal, power and integrity, writing style

Introduction

Addressing the issue of tourism as an object of study from the social sciences is not new, but when trying to analyze it from the paradigm of sustainable tourism, it is necessary to take into consideration that:

Nowadays, tourism is a very broad subject of study, encompassing various dimensions: social, economic, cultural, psychological, among others. It is not only an economic phenomenon, but above all a social one, so its study will have to consider a series of variables that are not exclusively economic, but also social and psychological (Martín; 2000). [8]

Since the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism (TS) in Lanzarote in 1995, there has been talk about the implications of developing a sustainable tourism strategy [10]. The (TS) is one of the strategic bets of many countries to oxygenate, on the one hand, the high levels of poverty typical of developing countries and, on the other, to compensate in some way for the damage that is being caused at the environmental level; The Central American region is no exception in

this adoption, which is why this project focuses on a tourist destination in El Salvador, a country that, despite having a national tourism plan, experiences scenarios that are not so aligned with the concept defined in a general way by the Institute of Responsible Tourism: "The Sustainable Development of destinations is an integrative process that includes the public managers of the destination, the citizens, their companies and services, and the mechanisms for promoting the destination and communicating with tourists" (p. 2).

Trying to be more explicit in the definition of each key actor, it should be understood that the public officials of the destination refer to the municipal administration that is responsible in the base municipality of the project and that henceforth becomes the tourist destination and this must in some way be aligned with [6]; The second actor is made up of the inhabitants of the municipality and/or tourist destination; The third actor are the companies that are linked to the tourist activity of the destination such as restaurants, bars, hostels, sales of handicraft products, galleries, museums, among others, and finally the mechanisms of promotion and communication with tourism that are articulated through tour operators, travel agencies, tourist guides and any promotional and communication effort that comes from the previously mentioned actors.

According to [5], a tourist destination is:

A local tourist destination is a physical space where the visitor spends at least one night. It includes tourism products such as support services and tourist attractions and resources within a radius that allows you to get there and back in the day. (p. 20)

El Salvador in general has seen an increase in the arrival of foreign tourists after the reopening of post-pandemic tourism activity, but it should be noted that these arrivals are mostly from the diaspora residing in the United States of America, as detailed in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Infographic on tourist entry behavior.

Note: There is a 27% increase in the arrival of foreign tourists to the country compared to 2019, the year prior to the pandemic. Source: [12].

The municipality of Suchitoto is the destination selected for the research project due to several factors, including having been declared a Historic Site of Cultural Interest, according to publication in the Official Gazette no. 88, volume no. 335, dated May 16, 1997. (Ministry of Culture, 2024); Another factor is that just 10 kilometers south of Suchitoto is old city, a site considered of great historical value because it has been proven that it was one of the places colonized by the Spaniards, to establish the first Villa de San Salvador, by the then Diego de Alvarado (1525), [7]. Additionally, the municipality still preserves a good part of the architectural material heritage of yesteryear, conditions that make it very conducive to attracting tourists who like sustainable tourism.

With the label of sustainable destinations, El Salvador does not have a large offer of tourist attractions, probably because the concept as such has not permeated sufficiently at the level of the different tour operators, because the strategy of the central government itself is more oriented to develop the Surf City concept as the main strategy

to attract foreign tourists but without achieving the impacts that are required in the socio-cultural, the economic and the environmental; It is perceived that at the level of companies that depend on tourism activity as such, they prioritize being even more in tune with hotel facilities of international chains than with a concept that seeks, as far as possible, the least impact on the generation of greenhouse gases through the use of electrical appliances that depend on an energy matrix of energies that subsist with the use of derivatives of greenhouse gases. hydrocarbons, the culture of using many products for human consumption that have non-biodegradable plastic containers persists, new hotel companies continue to be authorized although green areas continue to be degraded, mainly in the few areas that still conserve the natural environment, and all this contrasts with a vision of generating conditions of sustainability for tourism activity. For this reason, foreign tourists still prefer to visit Guatemala, Costa Rica or Belize rather than opt for El Salvador as a sustainable destination.

In order to achieve in some way the reduction of the socioeconomic inequality gaps of the majority of the population, it is necessary to bet on territorial strategies that generate productive dynamics at the local level and thus be able to aspire to a medium and long-term sustainability of populations in vulnerable conditions that have not been able to access a dignified form of income generation in their own localities and therefore it is necessary to achieve a sustainable and sustainable economy. makes internal and external migration an almost irremediable option and the (TS) must promote the conditions for more people to join this vision of a sustainable destination taking advantage of the natural riches and the historical and cultural heritage that is so sought after and enjoyed today by more and more travelers at an international level, Hence, it is important for a territory to assess how close or distant it can be to achieve that ideal of sustainable development.

Based on the above, the four axes on which El Salvador's 2020-2030 sustainable tourism strategy is based are taken up: "Preserve the National Sociocultural and Natural Heritage; Management of Our Capabilities and Potentialities; Tourism Demand Management; Institutionality of the Sector, aimed at strengthening ourselves as a country in the field of tourism" (National Tourism Plan El Salvador 2030, n.d., p.p. 53-54). To try to identify how much this country plan has permeated in relation to the local level and mostly its applicability in the territorial level. It is clear that many times plans are generated at the central government level but do not go down to the local level to have the effects that are proposed at the national level; And it is precisely in the post-pandemic current situation that tourism figures in most countries are positive and on the other hand, it is important to emphasize that the country in general, as a result of the decisions on security, have helped both local and international tourists to pay more attention to the tourist offer that they have as a country and within it there are some destinations with potential for the development of tourism. A sustainable tourism strategy.

All of the above is posed with the intention of answering the following questions: Will the conditions exist in the tourist destination under study to develop a sustainable tourism strategy, ¿What is missing to correctly align a sustainable tourism strategy?, finally: What benefits would the construction of a framework of indicators for the sustainable tourism management developed bring to the tourist destination?

MATERIALS AND METHODS.

For the development of the project, a qualitative methodology is used by the case study technique, given the nature of focusing the interest on a single unit of analysis that is currently made up of the municipality of Suchitoto itself, which later becomes the tourist destination to be evaluated. According to [1] As a methodological research procedure, the case study is developed through a cyclical and progressive process, which starts from the definition of a relevant topic to be investigated. These issues are studied in the unit of analysis, data are collected, analyzed, interpreted, and validated; Then, the case is drafted. (p. 16)

Information collection is carried out through the techniques of participant and non-participant observation, in-depth and focused interviews.

According to [9] each one has a different connotation:

In-depth interview, a type of qualitative interview of a holistic nature, in which the object of research is constituted by the life, experiences, ideas, values and symbolic structure of the interviewee here and now. and focused interviews aims to answer very specific questions, such as more influential stimuli, more notorious effects, difference of meaning between subjects subjected to the same experience (Ruiz Olaguénaga & Ispizua, 1989, p. 153). (p. 327)

The fact of using two different forms of interview is due to the very nature of the key actors identified: public actors (Tourism Unit of the Mayor's Office of the Municipality of Suchitoto, Ministry of Tourism, Salvadoran Tourism Corporation), society, companies providing services to tourists (hotels, hostels, restaurants, museums, souvenir shops, bars, among others) and companies linked to the transfer of tourists (travel agencies, tour operators, tour guides). On the other hand, the analysis strategy is based on content analysis through the identification of variables defined as: social dimension, economic dimension and environmental dimension.

RESULTS.

At the end of the analysis phase of the results, each of the areas or dimensions investigated is summarized with the different actors involved in the tourism activity of the selected destination.

Socio-cultural dimension: the historical and cultural heritage of the destination is valuable and is also identified by the vast majority of residents, but with regard to the concept of (TS) there is a lot of ignorance both at the level of the population and in the people who work providing some type of service to tourists, which does not make it possible to generate better conditions to promote an appropriation of it; there is also a low culture of the national tourist with respect to the of their preferences (TS), the vast majority continue to consume leisure tourism and there is very little overnight stay of the national tourist, it is also important to point out that the foreign tourist who visits the destination most frequently are Salvadorans who reside in the United States of America and that the different factors make up the diaspora and they do not prefer sustainable tourism but rather a tourism more associated with the consumption of other types of tourism such as the beach guy or the doctor.

It should be clarified that there is no inventory of tangible and intangible resources to guide the formulation of policies to safeguard the practices of sustainable tourism in the destination; On the one hand, the Tourism Unit of the municipality has identified some attractions located in rural areas with a certain potential of (TS), however, the tourist who seeks this type of experience is unaware of its existence due to an inadequate promotional work and above all the definition of the psychographic profile of this type of market.

Economic dimension: beyond the direct benefits generated by the arrival of tourists to a destination, it is observed that even tour operators and/or tourist service companies are not able to cover the supply of jobs to the productive force of the destination, internal migration always persists to obtain a source of income for their families, in most cases in some neighboring municipalities with greater activity Productive.

It is notorious that there is a lot of work to be done among the different actors to generate the right conditions for the development of small and medium-sized businesses linked to the sustainable activity of tourism, since there is a lack of more conviction that tourism activity can facilitate better living conditions for its inhabitants; But in order to do so, they must be interested, and this implies a better effort on the part of local authorities and companies in the financial sector.

According to comments from businessmen who work developing some destinations under the concept of (TS) with foreign tourists, they express that these tourists regret some actions that betray the very low awareness that national tourists have regarding valuing the cultural wealth of the destination and in addition to this, they pollute the environment through the incorrect action of disposal of solid waste in their visits to the tourist destination.

Environmental dimension:

On the part of the municipal administration (Suchitoto mayor's office) in general in El Salvador, given the periodicity of its public election processes that are held every three years according to the law, it generates a lot of instability in the actions that may be developed in the area of (TS), which prevents plans from being developed in a consistent way for the benefit of the municipality. of destiny and therefore of the inhabitants. Such is the case that although it is true that there are municipal ordinances that seek to protect heritage and infrastructure, as well as some provisions that regulate the final disposal of solid waste and the protection of green or natural areas within the municipality.

Thus, when approaching those responsible for tour operators, they express that the actions they develop are more at the level of their own companies and not that there is a true integration of efforts between the commune, tour operators, civil society, non-governmental organizations with environmental programs, educational centers and all the actors involved in taking environmental protection actions. In short, the biggest challenge is the articulation and high participation for the benefit of the destination and that by its own result it will benefit both national and foreign tourists, thus reflecting an efficient and effective model of (TS).

Undoubtedly, the current conditions of the destination to adopt a strategy of (TS) are minimal, but the interesting thing is to be clear that there are efforts, although small, in some of the actors it is necessary to raise those who

are interested in initiating a gradual process to join efforts on the same vision and this can be supported by the following steps detailed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Integrate all the information on the destination's tourism sustainability.

Steps to follow	What currently exists	What do you want to have	How to achieve
What instruments will be necessary to collect sustainability information for the tourist destination.			
Who must collect said information to later be analyzed for the benefit of the tourist destination.			
What type of indicators will be necessary to measure the tourism sustainability of the destination.			
Generate information for the sustainable management of tourism at the destination with indicators.			
Integrate all the tourism sustainability information of the destination at a local observatory for analysis purposes the actors involved to disseminate the achievements reached society in general, national and international.			

Source: Authors' own elaboration adapted from [3]

CONCLUSIONS.

Suchitoto as a sustainable tourist destination has a long way to go in the sense of having some conditions for its strategic commitment, but it does not have the necessary articulation between its actors to develop as a truly sustainable destination.

In a sequence of suggested steps to achieve this sustainability as a destination, some actions that can contribute to this are identified and summarized below:

- I. Inventory tangible and intangible resources that are aligned with a concept of sustainability.
- II. To consistently commit to processes of participatory involvement of all the actors linked to the destination (municipal administration, citizens, entrepreneurs, businessmen, tour operators, tourist guides, travel agencies) to define priorities with respect to the strategic axes proposed by the central government but applied to the reality of the territory in which the destination is located.
- III. Propose the creation of a sustainability observatory that connects the destination with the world through technology, as well as integrates different services in terms of supply and demand of the destination, such as: the offer of tourist services: restaurants, hotels, hostels, museums, souvenir shops, hospitals; the inventory of sustainable tangible and intangible resources; sustainability certifications granted to companies providing services to tourists; the framework of indicators for a better management of the resources available to tourists and, above all, the certainty of being in a destination in harmony with the environment and the community.
- IV. Establish a process for the self-sustainability of the observatory as well as for other actions to strengthen the capacities and conditions of the inhabitants of the communities of the municipality that comes from those companies committed to the adoption of a sustainability strategy for Suchitoto.
- V. Some of the first proposed indicators are:
 - a. Residents' satisfaction with the tourist activity.
 - b. Social benefits associated with tourism activity.
 - c. Changes in residents' way of life because of tourism activity.
 - d. Control of the tourist load to the destination.
 - e. Residents' access to the different attractions.

- f. Cost of access to attractions expressed as hourly cost of the minimum wage in the geographical area.
- g. Percentage of residents employed in companies associated with tourism activity.
- h. Proportion of women to men in total employment in the tourism sector.
- i. Proportion of employees trained in non-formal education programs and paid for by the business owner.
- j. Percentage of residents who are part of the group of suppliers of goods and services to companies in the tourism sector.
- k. Percentage of financing programs for residents who wish to invest in a business linked to tourism activity.
- l. Number of non-governmental organizations with a presence in the destination that ensure the rights of vulnerable populations.
- m. Number of businesses with prostitution services in or around the tourist destination.
- n. Number of municipal laws or ordinances for the protection of the destination's cultural and historical heritage.
- o. Contributions of tourism activity to heritage conservation.
- p. Number of places with up-to-date information about activities within the tourist destination.
- q. Frequency of use of the destination's tourist information.
- r. Number of tour operators or companies that offer services under the concept of sustainable tourism.
- s. Tourist satisfaction level when leaving the destination.
- t. Frequency of visits by tourists and number of overnight stays within the destination.
- u. Number of tour operators with infrastructure for the care of people with disabilities.
- v. Number of operators using clean energy.
- w. Number of operators with 100 percent smoke-free locations.
- x. Number of operators certified with good practices in food and beverage preparation. (Adapted from the practical guide for the implementation of sustainable tourism indicators).

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